(d) whether the Ministry is aware of the approximate number of workers working in Salt production industry; if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRIASHWANI KUMAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) There is no proposal to reclaim any coastal land or allow any development in tracks with mangroves. The question, therefore, does not arise.

(d) About 1.20 lakh workers are employed in the country in the salt industry and the average number of workers in Mumbai in this industry is 437.

Agreement of Safta

†2753. SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:
SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have entered into an agreement on relating to South Asian Free Trade Area;

(b) if so, which countries have been included so far in this agreement;

(c) the categories under which these countries have been put into; and

(d) whether any assessment regarding the increase or decrease in the revenue of the Government as a result of decline in rates of import duty under this agreements has been made and if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) India is a signatory of the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) which has come into force from 1 January 2006. The other signatories of SAFTA are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

(c) India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have been categorized as Non-Least Developed Contracting States (Non-LDCs) and Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal have been categorized as least Development Contracting States. (LDCs).

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(d) Article 7 of the SAFTA provides for a phased Tariff Liberalization Programme (TLP) covering all tariff lines except those in the Sensitive List of each Contracting State. In view of different budget periods of the contracting States, TLP has been given effect from 1" July 2006, except in the case of Nepal for which it is from 1st August 2006. Implementation of SAFTA is expected to significantly boost Intra-SAARC Trade and economies of all contracting States including India but it cannot be quantified at this stage.

Formation of a new WTO like association

2754.SHRI RUDRA NARAYAN PANY:
SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether India is working towards organizing the third world countries to form a new association or forum like "World Trade Organisation";

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) In view of the benefits accruing from its membership of the WTO, which has agreements that are rule-based, transparent and predictable, the issue of forming an alternative forum to the WTO has not been considered.

Special Economic Zones

2755. SHRI HITTABRATAMAJUMDAR:
SHRI TAPAN KUMAR SEN:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the number and locations of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) approved by Government;